



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 2
290 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NY 10007-1866

OCT 18 2006

Dr. Edward Michalenko
Onondaga Environmental Institute
102 W. Division St., 3rd Floor
Syracuse, New York 13204

Dear Dr. Michalenko:

This is to inform you that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined that the proposed improvements to the Snalvin ditch diversion channel in the Town of Tully, Onondaga County, New York are categorically excluded (CATEX) from substantive environmental review requirements, pursuant to 40 CFR Part 6. The project is being partially funded through a federal Special Appropriation Act grant (Grant No. XP98281601).

Based on our review of the supporting documentation, EPA approves the request for the CATEX. Please be reminded that EPA may revoke this CATEX if any of the following conditions occur:

- changes in the proposed action render it ineligible for exclusion;
- new evidence indicates that serious local or environmental issues exist; or
- federal, state, or local laws would be violated.

Should you have any questions regarding this decision, please address them to John Filippelli, Chief, Strategic Planning and Multi-Media Programs Branch, at the above address. Please note this CATEX will be available on EPA Region 2's website at <http://www.epa.gov/region02/spmm/r2nepa.htm>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Alan J. Steinberg", is written over the typed name.

Alan J. Steinberg
Regional Administrator

Enclosure

cc: Jeffrey Carmichael, OCSWCD (w/enclosure.)

ENCLOSURE

Town of Tully Repair and Stabilization of the Snalvin Diversion Channel Onondaga County, New York Special Appropriation Grant Project No. XP98281601

Background

The Tully Valley mudboils, or mud volcanoes, have been discharging suspended and bed-load sediment to Onondaga Creek for over 100 years. In June 1992, the Onondaga Lake Management Conference funded construction of the Snalvin Diversion Channel. This channel was constructed to route water from the upstream watershed directly to Onondaga Creek without flowing through the main mudboil depression area (MDA) in order to reduce its water pressure and therefore the number and size of the mudboils. Construction of the 1992 upstream diversion channel was designed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Conservation Service. During the past few years, severe storm events have caused erosion of the Snalvin diversion channel leading to sediment loss to Onondaga Creek. Also, a contiguous farm has been experiencing damage including loss of farm land and erosion of its access road.

Proposed Action

This project proposes to repair and stabilize the existing channel. The proposed rehabilitation of the Snalvin diversion channel (downstream section) was designed by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The project involves the repair of 1,200 feet of channel using a combination of rock riprap protection along severely eroded areas of the channel along with vegetation on stable slopes. This reinforced channel will be able to convey the water without causing erosion.

Other Alternatives Considered

The following alternatives were also evaluated:

Alternative 1: *No action* - If the No-action alternative is implemented, future storms will exacerbate channel erosion resulting in continued sediment deposition into Onondaga Creek. Further, the adjoining farm will continue to suffer from loss of productive agricultural land, damage to crops, and impairment to its access road. Eventually, this alternative would lead to an increased likelihood of severe alterations to the aquatic and terrestrial environments adjacent to active mudboils as less and less water is diverted from the MDA.

Alternative 2: *No rock riprap action* - Another alternative that was evaluated included the use of no rock riprap in the rehabilitation and instead trying to utilize an 8:1 or 10:1 grassed waterway. This alternative was rejected as this would not provide an adequate level of protection to the neighboring farmland (i.e., crop land losses would continue under this alternative.) In addition, the effectiveness of this alternative would be limited because of sinuosity of the channel through this area.

Eligibility for Granting a Categorical Exclusion

The project meets the general Categorical Exclusion (CATEX) eligibility criteria found in 40 CFR 6.107(d)(1). The regulations allow CATEXs for activities involving "actions which are solely directed toward ... minor rehabilitation of existing facilities, functional replacement of equipment, or ... construction of new ancillary facilities adjacent or appurtenant to existing facilities."

Additionally, the available information on the proposed action indicates that the specific criteria for not granting a CATEX, found in 40 CFR 6.107(e), are not present. Specifically, the project will not result in a new or relocated discharge to surface or ground waters; will not increase the amount of pollutants discharged to receiving waters; and will not provide capacity to serve a population significantly greater than the existing population. Furthermore, there will be no significant adverse effects on cultural resources, endangered or threatened species, environmentally sensitive areas, or other environmentally important natural resource areas.

Conclusion

The proposed action conforms to the category of actions eligible for exclusion under 40 CFR 6.107(d)(1). Accordingly, EPA approves this request for a CATEX from detailed environmental review pursuant to our procedures for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act.